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George Bush's swan song

GEORGE BUSH'S public service career may be in eclipse, but the Central Intelligence Agency director is riding down to the wire in trademark integrity and straight talk.

The Texan recently stepped out of the solitude of intelligence secrecy to go on national television to blast those who spill secrets involving national security.

It had to do with carefully managed leaks of a new CIA report on long-range Soviet military plans — leaks that planted top secret information in the press. To Bush it was an "appalling" act that violated security agreements and showed an intolerable lack of discipline in the intelligence community.

IT INFURIATED Bush and his temperature rose even higher when some implied that the CIA had deliberately leaked the information to make life uncomfortable for incoming President Jimmy Carter.

Around Washington the speculation was that the CIA leaked scare talk on growing Soviet military supremacy to dissuade Carter from following campaign promises to cut the national defense budget by billions of dollars. That bullet struck Bush amidship and he very grimly denied it.

He said he had agreed to come out of the shadows of CIA and onto national television precisely to "gun down" such tawdry talk and that the CIA had "great integrity" and would never offer conclusions to force the hand of a President or a President-elect.

Bush's contempt for secret spillers in

government is shared by a lot of others. Since Watergate and the Pentagon papers there has been a growing string of leaks, some of which brushed extremely close to endangering the national security.

It may not be the winning thing to



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do, politically, but George Bush stood up to (1) condemn the sources of leaks within the intelligence system and (2) obliquely remind the recipient press that it, too, should examine its responsibility.

It was characteristic of the man, whose future is uncertain.

Once before, we reflected in this spot that if Mr. Jimmy Carter really wanted to show a splash of sorely needed bipartisan class he would consider George Bush for a lofty place on his new team.

For the record, our reward was a very positive 90 per cent reaffirmation of trust and faith in the rangy transplanted Texan and a murmuring 10 per cent who informed us that Mr. Carter could handle his own Democrat business — which did not include the naming of

a former GOP national party chairman to his fold.

Mr. Carter not only ignored the wisdom we dispensed but, according to the insider journalists, wrote the fiftyish Bush off his list in brusque finality.

It seems that when George Bush made the traditional official pilgrimage to Plains, Ga., several weeks ago for a daylong briefing of the President-elect on the nation's critical intelligence systems, the atmosphere became a bit electric.

LEAKED REPORTS (again) indicated that Bush was set up for a head-to-head delineation of highly sensitive foreign problems with the new President but balked when some of Mr. Carter's youngish aides appeared for the session.

It was reported, with only silence and no corroboration from either side, that Bush declined to go over the entire inventory of crises in the presence of Carter campaign aides who had not received cleansing national security clearance.

Something happened, for sure. Only a few days later George Bush submitted, irrevocably, his resignation as CIA director — effective the day after Mr. Carter's inauguration. Since then, Mr. Carter has named Ted Sorenson, the old John F. Kennedy speechwriter, as the new CIA chief.

Too bad that George Bush is going into at least temporary eclipse as a public servant. His latest, and perhaps final, act indicates the soundness of his concerns for this nation.